

## **Best Practice Tips for Family Style Meals**

### **Iowa Child and Adult Care Food Program**

This is a list of ideas from child care centers and homes in Iowa. Thanks to those who contributed their suggestions.

1. Plan a quiet activity or story before meals.
2. Wash hands just before meal time. Soap, running water, suds, individual paper towels and adult supervision are necessary for clean hands.
3. Children may help with table setting. Instruction and adult supervision is necessary for good sanitation.
4. Have all foods and utensils on the table before children sit down. A few extra clean utensils on the table or serving cart will make it possible to replace dropped items without leaving the children unsupervised during meals.
5. Children may choose places or have assigned tables/ seats using name cards, colors or shapes. Do not overcrowd tables, this encourages spills. An adult at each table is best.
6. To observe possible choking and to encourage sanitation, the teacher should be seated at the table from the beginning to the end of the meal. Sit in the center, not at the end of the table to supervise and assist with passing foods. To avoid choking, children should not be excused from the table if they still have food in their mouths
7. Use child sized serving containers (pitchers, bowls) and utensils for family style service. Children should pass all foods before they begin eating. A child may then say when "it's time for everyone to eat".
8. Children may not be forced to take or taste foods. However, if they do not take foods the first time they are passed, the adult should again offer these foods to the children before they are excused from the table.
9. Speak with children at your table. Be relaxed, personal and speak with each child by name. Talk about the foods you are eating, where they come from, why they are good for us, colors, shapes flavors. Mealtime is part of the learning environment and provides an optimal opportunity to develop reading and math readiness skills through sense based learning.
10. Children should be appropriately encouraged to taste and eat the foods provided. Children should never be forced to eat. Foods should not be used to discipline or reward children. Eating or finishing one food should not be required before another food is offered.
11. Adults should eat the same foods as children at meals. Adults who positively model food acceptance and tasting new foods are the strongest influence on children's food preferences. This important part of a quality child care environment should be written into staff job descriptions. If adults need special foods due to health conditions or disabilities, this should be openly explained to children.
12. Having access to paper towels or sudsy cloths makes it possible for children to clean up after their spills. This fosters feelings of competence. Children should not feel bad about spilling, but will learn that spills just happen and the important thing is to make things right again.
13. Children can easily clear their own places. By excusing a few children at a time, the clean up area is less congested and there are fewer spills. A clean up table near the kitchen may include a table to rest the plate on, a garbage can for paper waste and food scraps, a pan to collect dishes, a sudsy pan to pre

soak utensils and sponges or paper towels to wipe their place at the table. Going to a book or puzzle area gives faster eaters a quiet activity near the eating area until others finish their meals. One teacher should go to the activity area with the children, but at least one teacher should remain with eating children until all are finished.

14. Children need plenty of time to eat, and should not be rushed to finish the meal. Even if children choose not to take foods or to eat, they will benefit from socializing with the group at the table to talk, listen and relax.
15. It is best to have a supervising adult seated at each table. This may include the teacher, teacher assistant, administrator, bus driver, volunteer, cook and maintenance worker. All adults should be trained in mealtime policies and expectations so interaction with children will be consistent.
16. Teachers need a break time during the day to attend to their personal needs and to decrease job related stress. Teachers may then eat other foods of their choosing such as coffee, pop, etc which should not be eaten during the children's mealtime.